

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto, 82, former Japanese school teacher and American Factors clerk

"I tell you, when the farmers have bad luck and not enough crop, they come to the store. Then they say, 'Well, this year the blight comes around and I don't have' --and naturally, the store will bring that to the American Factors, too. So, if the store ever experience loss from a particular farmer, well, the original financier--the AmFac--is always the one that carries the burden. . . . So, it looks that American Factors actually made money, but on reality, I don't think the Factors was made any richer than anybody else."

Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto was born on February 19, 1899, in Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan. In 1908, he joined his father, a laborer at Ewa Sugar Plantation on Oahu.

In 1911, Lloyd and his family moved to Honolulu where his father started a tailor shop and hauling business. They also bought a taro field and carp pond in Moiliili.

Skilled in the Japanese language, Lloyd founded a Japanese-language school in Waimanalo in 1922. A few years later, he came to Kona to teach but eventually left the profession for employment at American Factors, Napoopoo. In the mid-1930s, Lloyd moved to Hilo where he continued to work for American Factors.

In 1978, Lloyd again became a Kona resident. Today, he spends much of his time reading periodicals and repairing small appliances.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto (LS)

October 1, 1980

Kealahakua, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Modesto Daranciang (MD) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MD: This is an interview with Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto. Today is October 1, 1980, and we're at his home at Hale Ho'okipa elderly housing, Kealahakua, Kona, Hawaii.

Mr. Sugimoto, where and when were you born?

LS: I was born in Japan, Hiroshima-ken--a place called Otake-shi--in February 19, 1899, in American calendar.

MD: What were your parents doing at that time when you were born?

LS: Well, in the place where I was born, partly farmer; and most of the people were partly paper manufacturer. These papers like you use as toilet tissue over here--the Japan type--in, I think, about 9-by-11 [inches] square. But, my father, of course, most of the time, he was a buyer or wholesaler, or middleman, you may call, for lumber. He goes up to the mountain where those people are cutting the logs to boards; and he buys them, brings them to the city, and sells them to the carpenter. Sort of a commissioned merchant, you may call it.

MD: How much of an income do you think he makes from that business?

LS: Well, I tell you, all of our income when I was a little boy, they did not go mostly by money. They go by rice--amount of rice they give you. Isshō is equivalent to. . . . It's a measure box about, say, 7-by-7 by about 6 inches deep. Full [of rice] in there, they call it issō. And one person, I think, they were talking about nishō [two boxes] was the normal pay.

MD: How much [in] numbers is his income equivalent?

LS: Oh, it's equivalent to--I cannot say. I do not know.

MD: So, many people do that job like your father?

LS: No, no. Each one, of course, does everything that is suitable for himself. My father had not gone to school very much. Those days, very few people go to school. But he was one of those lucky ones because he was always closely related to the Buddhist temple. That's how he got little better education than the ordinary people.

MD: How would you compare your father's income to the other people around?

LS: You mean, those days?

MD: Yeah, around the area.

LS: Well, I would say, he was getting better than normal. That was always the case. I wish I can tell you just about how much. I'm not sure, so I better not talk about the dollars and cents, you know.

MD: Can you tell us about the housing at that time?

LS: Well, in Japan, just like these ordinary Hawaiians. Even if it was a crude building, they usually own their own home. And, of course, in my place, my father had a decent house. It's on the same place, and it's almost the same shape. But it's still standing, yet.

MD: How would you compare your house with the other people around?

LS: Well, I wouldn't say any extra good. But it's just about ordinary, everybody else, without any short of, you know. Say, "Oh, that house is short; that house is too small." It's pretty fairly good.

MD: Also, can you tell us about the food?

LS: Well, you know, Japanese are vegetarian. So, as I remember, when I first ate what we call the beef--cow meat--was when I just beginning to start going to school. There was a lady--a widow--living in the next yard [who] had lots of room. So, she was renting a room. One of the teachers that take care of me in school was living with her. And every quite often, she used to ask me to go to the store and go buy meat--beef. They cook so-called "hekk." That's the first time I ever taste beef.

MD: Do you think, at that time, the nutritional value of the food was good?

LS: Well, I would say, that was nutritious, must be. Must be fairly good. Most of them, the stock or the base foundation was mostly of iriko. You know what is iriko? It's those dried fish. And aburage. That's tōfu; deep-fried tōfu. That's what they used, mostly.

Of course, those days, the life expectancy wasn't as good as nowadays. You know, old Japanese used to say that life is 50 years--"Jinsei

gojūnen." Fifty years was the life expectancy, those days.

MD: Lloyd, how would you compare your family's socio-economic status with the people around?

LS: You mean, around the neighborhood? Well, I would say, it's above average. Yeah. Because my father used to do those merchant--sort of middle buying when my grandmother used to work for the pawnshop. You know, lot of those poor people, they hard up with money. So they come to my grandmother. She used to pack the clothes and take it to the pawnshop to pawn the clothes and bring money for them. So, there must have been fairly good spending.

MD: You mentioned about your father's job, okay? But how about your mother? What was she doing?

LS: Nothing. Just helping around the house--domestic work. And, of course, in Japan, like you read in the Mainland, the same thing. Where the house is a farmer, the whole family is the farmer, including the wife. So, my mother always used to go out [to work]. Only, she gets home little earlier to prepare the food and so on.

MD: Are there any other kinds of jobs that the other people around are doing?

LS: Well, some are tradesmen; some are farmer. Tradesmen are carpenter, mason, and, of course, there were no plumber. And what else? Those roofer. That was a special trade by itself. Making roof--thatched grass. See, it's a different trade altogether. And some were merchants, like fishermen--fish peddler. Very few stores, those days.

You talk about the stores, now. Those days, as I remember, if you see a candy store, they sell candy only. And if you see a novelty store, that's all they sell--like combs, and hair-tying string, and ribbon, and so forth. So, they all had their share of business.

MD: In that area, what is the main job or the main support of the area?

LS: In the whole area? Well, they were the same. Some are farmer; and some are a carpenter; some are a mason.

MD: Now, this is your recollection before your parents moved to Hawaii, okay?

LS: Yeah.

MD: Now, we're going to the area when your parents came to Hawaii. Do you know the reason why your parents moved to Hawaii?

LS: Well, you know how it is. Those government contract. They come

around and propanganda. Talk as though you just go to Hawaii and the money will just rake it in. See? That's not only my parents. Everyone. Some, of course, came by themselves. They said, "Well, that's all right. I'm going to sweat around for three years and come back." And that three years, that's about hundred times the three years, now. Look, the first issei [are] still here.

MD: With all those nice talks, what do you think was the very reason why your parents come to Hawaii?

LS: Well, I don't think they ever believed such things, though. I don't think they ever believed that sweet story. They know they have to work. And, of course, they explain exactly what they have to do at plantation, sugar plantation. Strictly on sugar plantation only. So, ordinarily, they start with hō hana or what they call the holehole, pulling the cane leaf. But my father started [as a] portable track foreman. He, in Japan, never worked on railroad line at all. But he learned English a little faster than the rest of them. So, he came to work.

Do you understand what is a portable railroad? You see, they going to harvest this field--field number 29 [for example]. Now, when they do, they going to start a fire to burn the [sugarcane] leaf--dry leaf--to eliminate the trouble of getting those leaves through the machine in the mill. So, they burn it, then they start to cut. Those things have to be transported. In order to transport this cane, they make a portable railroad rail all in different direction. So, my father was the foreman for that thing.

MD: Moving back to Japan, now, did others from your area come to Hawaii?

LS: Yeah. You mean, around our house?

MD: In Japan.

LS: Oh, yeah. Plenty came.

MD: How many, do you think?

LS: That, I do not know. Well, practically, almost every house[hold] around our place came.

MD: Your parents--your mother and father--came first [i.e., before LS]?

LS: Yeah.

MD: They arrived in Honolulu. After arriving in Honolulu, where did they go?

LS: Well, they were not the government contract labor then, already. The contract business was abolished [in 1898] just before my parents came to Hawaii [in 1903]. They were free immigrants. They used to

call it "jiyū imin." So, when he came, he was assigned, I don't know how, to Ewa Plantation. And when he got there, they supply a fairly good--you know, for a working man--cottage, although it was just a 1-by-12 made. But very private, with a surrounding yard, enough to plant green onions, and papaya, and you still can raise chicken.

And the sanitary condition, you must say, it was good. For example, we have water closet today. They didn't have such a fancy thing. But you go to those thing like a privy, but the bowl was a box, wooden box. Every day or every other day, there, the labor emptied out and they put the coating of whitewash. They always kept 'em very clean.

MD: When your father worked in Ewa, you told us that he was a portable railroad foreman, and you explained to us all what it is. Do you think he enjoyed the job or he liked the job?

LS: Well, he kept it up, and the plantation was perfectly satisfied. He kept up the work, and he had a group of men. His group must be a toughie--a strong guy--because they have to carry. Each track was, I think, about 12 feet. And they fasten with the steel tie. Just carry it, then throw it, and then bolt 'em on the side. That's how they join it.

MD: About your mother, did she do something, too? While your father was . . .

LS: Yeah, I understand when she first came to Hawaii, she used to go out and hanawai--irrigation. Or sometime, cleaning the cane. They call holehole--tearing the leaf off, the dry leaf, from the cane. But soon after--I don't know why--but she didn't work very long. She used to go [do] laundry for--you know Walter Ackerman? You don't know. Do you know the Von Hamm Young manager? His father used to be the railroad master, they call that. He had the control of the whole railroad system in Ewa. My mother used to go over there, laundry.

MD: How much was your mother getting paid?

LS: She get by the piece, I think. Five cents or ten cents apiece, I remember. But, my father. . . . You see, those days, when the first immigrant came, they were making \$14 a month. Then that thing was raised up to 16 until the [1909] strike came out. From then, \$26--in other words, dollar a day. But that dollar a day time, I know my father used to get \$35. Well, not much--26 against 35.

MD: Nine.

LS: Yeah, nine dollar difference, that's all.

MD: Your father and mother first came to Hawaii and you were left?

LS: I was left in Japan, and I was four years, then.

MD: You were left with your grandmother?

LS: Grandmother.

MD: How did you feel, now? What was your feeling when your parents . . .

LS: Nothing. I wouldn't know anything. You know, granny always take good care of the kids. Until she got sick. Just before she died, my mother came home to take care the sickbed. It didn't last very long after she came home. And after she [grandmother] died, then I came with her to Hawaii.

MD: Your mother?

LS: Yeah. I was nine then. So, from that, you can figure out. My father must have come to Hawaii somewheres around 1903. Judging from my age, that is. Figuring out from that.

MD: When your parents were here and you were left with your grandmother, did your parents write you from Hawaii?

LS: Oh, yes. Very constant. And not only write. He sent--I don't know--I think, maybe five or ten dollars.

MD: Every . . .

LS: Every month.

MD: Was that plenty money at that time?

LS: Oh, was a big money. They could live really extravagant.

MD: Can you remember anything they wrote about Hawaii?

LS: No, I have no idea at all. I didn't even know who and how my mother looked, except with the photograph. But you know how it is, eh? Blood is much thicker than water. By the sight, you will have your affection and love. Same thing with my father. I didn't know how he looked until he came one. . . . Yeah, that's where I get the idea of May 8th. That's the time, from immigration station, he take me out in May.

MD: You said your father and mother sent you money. Did you have enough money to spend with the money they sent you?

LS: Oh, in Japan? Oh, we were living good with that. I don't know how much, but I know every month my grandmother used to carry me on her back, go to the bank to get the money.

MD: Now, you are in Japan, yet, okay? What was school like in Japan when you were left in Japan?

LS: I think it was very good. I used to like it. Only I wasn't a very aggressive type because I was a weakling. Very weak. You know, I used to get sick every day. My grandmother used to carry me on her back, go to the doctor. The doctor, after examining, he remind my grandmother, "Hey, bā-san, take care good. This boy would not live to ten." I still remember that. The doctor said. Why? It's because I am the first grandson of the inheritor of Sugimoto. See?

MD: You were very important.

LS: Sure. I was very important to my grandmother. So, "Here, here. Eat this, eat this." Every day. No more chance for the stomach to rest the whole day. I was seven. She used to carry me on her back and take me to the school.

MD: Where was the school?

LS: Well, I used to think that was quite far. But when I went back [to Japan] the first time, 50 years and 11 days, I went back to the place where I was born. Yeah, it [the school] was right [near] there. (Laughs) I would say, about maybe a half mile or so from the house.

MD: What did you learn from the school?

LS: Well, how to write in Japan[ese]. Mathematics. They are very particular and they teach very good. When I came to Hawaii, I couldn't understand one word except math--arithmetic. The teacher draws (half) an apple, a plus sign, and she draws another half, then she puts "equal." Those kids over here, they didn't even know the thing was one. And division, the same thing. Because in Japan, I went to second grade. We learned all the multiplication table. Of course, in Japan, not like here. They don't teach you 1 to 12 and 12 times 12. Go 1, 9. Nine times 9, 81. That's period. One figure only. And we also had the division table, which over here children don't know nothing about. Of course, myself, now, I forgot everything.

MD: What do you like most from that school?

LS: Well, I don't know. I never had any special interest at all. I was just a common, ordinary kid. Nothing. . . .

MD: What you like least?

LS: Well, in the morning, you know, the discipline is very strict when we were little kids. That's why Japanese kids, they all know that. And I never did like the songs. I never liked those things. Music lesson. And we had arithmetic, reading, and writing. Writing, I

used to like, but. . . . What they call [calligraphy]. Something like that. I'm not good at it.

MD: What was it like? The everyday life when you were young in Japan?

LS: Well, that, I cannot say, no? I was only nine then. What else? If grandmother gives me--not every day, but now and then--something very sweet-tasting, that's about the best life I had.

MD: You said your grandmother did all the work, so did you contribute to anything, like helping in the kitchen or . . .

LS: [LS misinterprets question.] My grandmother? No. My grandmother, all she did was keep up her trade. That pawn business. You hard up for money, you come to grandmother, "Hey, bā-san, how much can I get for this thing?" and she has to take this to the. . .

MD: Pawnshop?

LS: Yeah, and then get the money. That's all she used to do. Otherwise, she didn't have to because my dad used to send enough money for the living.

MD: What you kids used to do for recreation?

LS: Well, you know, on seasonal, eh? Each time, the season different. But when winter, of course, we used to have lot of fun running around the snow. Our place doesn't have much. Say, about six inches is all about it does, when it comes the most. There were only, as I remember, one time, when we could dig a tunnel. Had about two feet, over here in American measure. Just once. Other times, never go beyond six inches.

MD: That's for winter. How about for summer?

LS: Well, then we get the beautiful Spring come around, we used to go catch cicada. Semi, you know. Yeah, go "gi-gi-gi-gi-gi-gi-gi-gi." Look like, but it's not a bird. They call it "cicada" or "cicāda." You never seen one? Philippine Island no more?

MD: The one make too much noise?

LS: Yeah.

MD: Cicada. Now, that's spring. Now, summer. How about summer? What recreation you have in summer?

LS: Then, summertime, all hot. So, we go down the river and soak ourself. That's about all. And, of course, we used to do lot of hiking, mountains. Of course, right near to the mountains. Although in Japan, most of those mountains are farmland, so almost from the bottom till right along the slope is all farm. All

cultivated nicely. Very little rough land--so-called real mountains.

MD: During the fall, now. You didn't tell something about what are recreation during the fall.

LS: Well, we have lots of fruits. All sort of fruits. They all come at one time. The best one I used to like is dried persimmon.

MD: Dried persimmon?

LS: Yeah. Dried ones. Not the raw one. I used to like that.

MD: What other fruits? Aside from the persimmon?

LS: Well, you get orange, and plum, and what else? All sorts. . . .

MD: Apples, too?

LS: Apples, in our place, no more. They used to come from Hokkaido. No more. Mikan got plenty. Of course, persimmon grows abundant. And orange, not this navel. But it used to taste pretty good. But not navel. And those tangerines, those small ones. They are very much abundant. Plenty.

MD: Can you remember about the holidays in Japan before you came to Hawaii?

LS: Well, we start in New Year. That's one. In February, that's the Kigen-setsu [Empire Day]--iuttara nani ka no? [How would you say it in English?] Darn, the word doesn't come out now. Counting of the era. Kigen is a historic period, or what you will call it. That's another one. Then when we go to around March to May, it's a flower festival season. Everybody goes under the flower and enjoy. And then, later part of June, we used to have the summer vacation. Well, there used to be lots of holiday because, you know, the traditional kind. They were, well, not the whole day. Maybe evening performance or something. And then, bumbai, we go catch those fireflies.

MD: Of all the holidays, which of the holidays do you like best?

LS: You see, in September, we have the. . . . These things are hard to express in English because, in America, there is no such thing. But something like in Hawaiian, we say that certain kahuna day, or holiday for the god, or whatever you call. We say the whole village was governed by that particular shrine or god. We had that--I think September or in October. And they still observing that thing in Japan. That was the time that they made the float and whatnot. Oh, it's a big thing. I just don't know the date, now. The date hasn't changed from that time. Back in 1975 when I was in Japan [for] six months, I visited one of those things.

MD: What do you think about these holidays?

LS: Very good. Because everybody comes out. Not only the kids, you know. The whole family! Family affair.

MD: In 1908, you said, you came to Hawaii. And your mother came for you.

LS: Well, she came to take care the grandma on her bed--illness. Then, after she [grandmother] passed away, then she have to come back. And then, I came with her. Oh, when I first came to Hawaii, those kids--my neighbors' kids--come around, eh? I don't know what they're talking, but they all gathered around me, and they asked me any (kind of) question. All I can remember is, "You na nani?" Would you understand? They said, "What is your name?" "You nana nani?" See, that's what they tells me. But I couldn't understand what that for, oh, long, long time afterwards. But, afterwards, I asked my mother, "What are they trying to tell me? 'You na nani? You nana nani?'"

"Oh," she say, "Omae no namae nani ka?" ["Your name, what is it?"]

Well, then, see, that was the first beginning. Then, they took me to kindergarten. I was nine, you know, and those kindergarten (laughs) small kids. Very fortunate I was a potot. Even right now, small. When I was 16 years old, we had 42 students in that Japanese school. I was the second from the small side. Maybe you would know, there's a physician in Honolulu--Tsuneichi Shinkawa. He was the smallest. Then come me. (Laughs) So, I just matched good (chuckles) with the local kids.

MD: You fit in. When you left Japan for Hawaii, what did you expect in Hawaii?

LS: Well, I didn't have any ambition or any expectation at all.

MD: Nothing?

LS: Yeah. Only thing, when we came, we went to quarantine station in Kobe, where they start testing your eyes, and then your physical condition. Then, my mother and my sister was together. A kid, small infant--not infant, but she was two years old. They passed. I don't pass. So, poor mother have to stay back two months. Finally, already, they started to tell me that I can come later on, but I'd better go back to [where] my auntie folks would take care me. But, you know, small kid, eh? I don't want to part, and I must have been crying my head off, so the officials took pity. They said, "All right, under one condition. You take very good care, and then we will see how you do in Honolulu." But when I came to Honolulu, I was all right, see? Now, my sister was sent to quarantine station, and I went to immigration station. My father, being a foreman on that--oh, I suppose was very important--job, he couldn't come during the day. That's how I was there long time, waiting to get the clearance of my sister and my mother; at the

same time, for my father to come and get me. That's how I stayed there about two months.

MD: Two months? That's in Japan?

LS: No, no. In Honolulu!

MD: But before you were in Honolulu, are there any types of inspection before you . . .

LS: Yeah. In Kobe. Yeah, I didn't pass over there, but Honolulu, I passed.

MD: What kind of inspections or requirements?

LS: Well, they come, turn your eyes, to start with. And then, they look down your throat. To kids like us, it wasn't so particular. But for men, there was a box about, say, seven or eight inches. And asked 'em to hop right over it for see if they're not broken leg, and so on, I guess. Then, of course, they will examine your bowel movement. And then, when you get those worms, ah, no pass. Then, they going injection and this and that. I never had those things. That's the first time I saw--you know where old Honolulu Ironworks used to be, down by that, where they have the floating drydock in Honolulu?

WN: Kakaako, eh?

LS: Yeah. Where they used to have a coal mountain, and the immigration station was right there. That was the end of that Fort Street City Rapid Transit. I sat down, looking from this side, seeing what a beautiful thing, which I had never seen in Japan.

But the best part was, in the boat, there was another kid just about my size and my age. We used to go and help the boat crew to sweep clean the thing and pull the basket around. And, end of the day, they used to give us bread. That's the first time I ever tasted bread, and I thought to myself, "Hey, shee, what a funny. . . . Those Americans, the people in Hawaii, eat something like fu." You know what fu is? You feed koi [carp] with? (Laughs) No more taste. And then, at the same time, sometime he gives us the fried little bird--deep-fried bird.

MD: Who put up the money?

LS: Oh, for coming?

MD: Yeah, for coming here.

LS: Oh, my father paid.

MD: How much?

LS: I don't know. I know back in--after I came to Kona--1924, see, my brother was with me. My father begged for him to come home, so I sent him, steerage--\$60. With eight days. And not very good kaukau, but they give you the food and sleeping. Eight or nine days, I think. So, only 60 [dollars].

MD: When you came here, what did you bring with you?

LS: Nothing.

MD: Clothes, toys?

LS: No toys, just the clothes. That's all.

MD: What port did you leave now, you said?

LS: Well, from Kobe. On the S.S. Manchuria. Was a big boat.

MD: How big was the boat? According to estimation.

LS: Well, I tell you, you ask me the tonnage, I wouldn't know. But I thought it was like almost as big as our school in Japan. It's a big thing.

MD: What were the conditions on the boat?

LS: Good. Of course, not a bed--it's a hammock. You know, two-by-four this way and a cloth in between.

MD: What part of the boat did you stay?

LS: Well, the steerage is always way in the back.

MD: How about the sleeping quarters?

LS: Well, the middle was the mess hall, and the two sides had the round windows. . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MD: How about the food?

LS: Well, it was rather greasy--you know, Chinese cook. And when [meal] time comes, "karan-karan-karan-karan-karan-karan-karan, come and get it."

MD: What foods?

LS: Rice with sort of a chop suey, only not fancy thing like you pay with money.

MD: Did you enjoy it?

LS: Yeah. I used to like that.

MD: How about activities on the boat? What do you do?

LS: Nothing to do. You can't go very far. Only like us--me and the other kids--we used to help the man cleaning the floor, pull the trash basket, where he put the trash in. That's about all we can do.

MD: You don't play games with the other boys?

LS: No more. There were only me and the kid, that's all. There were no other one.

MD: There was only one boy with you on the boat . . .

LS: Yeah. Me and the other one, about the same age. Only two.

MD: How about older? No more older people than you?

LS: Older people? Oh, yeah. They get together.

MD: Are there other ethnic groups, like Filipinos . . .

LS: No. When I came, all I know, strange one, was the Hindu. That's all I saw.

MD: That trip was how long, from Kobe to Honolulu?

LS: Kobe to Honolulu, I think, was about 10 days. I'm not so sure, but something around ten days.

MD: Is there something you can remember about the trip?

LS: Well, nothing. There was nothing different. Every day, the same thing.

MD: Did you like the trip?

LS: Yeah. I used to enjoy every day.

MD: You never got seasick?

LS: No, not much. The day after we left Kobe, at just the time when you hit that current, I think, that was kind of rough. Was just about one day. After that, I was perfectly all right.

MD: Okay, you arrived in Hawaii in March 11, 1908. When you first arrived here, do you remember anything that happened?

LS: Well, all I know is, in the boat, myself, my mother, and my sister were all together in that two [rooms]. They only allow us two. My mother and my sister, and I used to occupy one. Then, of course, we got to part. But I don't know any better where they going. All I know is, I was sent to the immigration station.

MD: Why are they sent to the immigration?

LS: Because I was perfectly healthy by then.

MD: How about them?

LS: There're something wrong with their--I don't know. Maybe vaccination, or something. So, they took them to the quarantine. The quarantine is across the bay--Sand Island. That's where it was, before.

MD: Your sister went to the quarantine station, and you stayed in the immigration station. How long did you stay there?

LS: Well, that's what I said. Long time.

MD: Two months, you said?

LS: Almost two months.

MD: How was it in the immigration office?

LS: Well, perfectly all right. Only thing, in the morning, we get up. We sleep, in Japan, [on] this kind of mat on the floor, eh? Over here, the spring shelf roll up, pull down. Get a small comforter. We sleep over there with the blanket. That's all. And in the morning, they just roll it up. Then the janitor come around, clean the place.

MD: How about the food?

LS: The food? Well, that, I already got used to the bread. You know? That koi food stuff. So, it was all right. And they give us rice, too.

MD: Okay, after staying there for two months . . .

LS: Not exactly, you know. Around two months. Oh, it was long time.

MD: Who came to get you out of the immigration office?

LS: My father. And then, I don't see how he could just delay like that. Well, his explanation was that his job, he could not leave any time. So, even at that, long after, he came after dark, you

know. Nighttime. And I don't know how my father really look like, see? But, like I say, blood is always thicker than water, see? First thing, he come around and call me. So, the official came to pick me up. He tell me, "Gather your clothes." So I did. Then he said, "Your father is out there, waiting for you, to take you home." When I see, I don't know who he is. You know, [father] being out in the sun whole day, all dark. But if he hadn't called me as his son and carry me, I wouldn't know who it is.

MD: Now, from immigration, you left Honolulu after you were out from the immigration?

LS: Yeah, that night, already, no more train. No more train to go. Early in the morning. So, we went to the hotel. And then, on the way home, he bought me shoes, pants, and a coat.

MD: You stayed in the hotel for one night?

LS: Yeah. He was so glad--oh, I don't suppose he was that broke--but he carry me on his back all the way from immigration to where Aala Park was. All the way. On the way, on Hotel Street--I remember even that store long after, where I went in and bought my clothes. Then, following morning, early in the morning, we went home. But even after I went home, I think, my mother wasn't still home, yet. I was ahead of her.

MD: When you say "home," that's Ewa?

LS: Yeah.

MD: Okay, before going to Ewa, what were your impressions about Honolulu?

LS: Honolulu? Well, I thought it was a heck of a big place. Because . . .

MD: Being a small boy, eh?

LS: Yeah. And then, not only that. The village [in Japan] where I came [from] wasn't such a big place, although we used to think "big." And then, that rapid transit. Oh, that was really--curiously, I just watch that thing whole night.

MD: What kind of a rapid transit?

LS: Haven't you fellas seen that? The one with one long car. About two times bigger than that one in San Francisco. They call that "trolley car." But not that small. It's a big thing, with the bench seat in the car. And the side is all open. You just jump on. Those days, was five cents, you know. That is, when I came to Honolulu few years later--live in Honolulu, used to go to school--school kids were half [fare]. Two and a half cents. With five cents, they give you one token. That's for come back time. Was a nice, good-riding car, because unlike on a road, any bumpy, you

feel. But on the track, all smooth. Was easy-riding car.

MD: When you left Honolulu, which plantation your father brought you to?
Is that Ewa?

LS: Well, he came from Ewa. He was working in Ewa. Well, I tell you, see, in Ewa, Meiji yonjū-ninen [the 42nd year of Meiji--i.e., 1909]--when that will be? That labor strike.

WN: In 1909.

LS: Labor strike. Hey, I have those calendars somewheres around here, if I look. My father. . . .

MD: Your father pick you up from Honolulu to Ewa. Will you tell us what kind of transportation brought you to Ewa?

LS: Oh! Nice train. Regular locomotive. Cha-cha-choo-choo-chaaa. Oahu Railroad had what they called the smaller gauge. The wheel base was 36 inches, while the one in Hilo, standard gauge, [was] 48 inches. That's the difference.

MD: Then, what kind of work was your father doing in Ewa?

LS: Well, portable track foreman.

MD: How about his working hours?

LS: Well, by God, he start early in the morning--booo [whistle sound]. And that, I think, 6 o'clock. They all go over there in the long train. Those cane cars--waiting over there. Everybody jumped on there. Then they separate them, I don't know how. But pau hana is--I know there were not eight hours. I think ten hours. Because they used to come back almost dark. They leave in the morning, 6 o'clock.

MD: And come back.

LS: Then, come back, almost dark.

MD: How much pay?

LS: Sixteen dollars, common [pay].

MD: Sixteen dollars a month?

LS: Ordinary. What they call the all men, everybody pay, equivalent. Except the wife--the women and the kids are different.

MD: Now, how about the working conditions?

LS: Oh, I guess they were all right. They didn't complain about the

working condition. They complain about the pay.

MD: You remember about benefits?

LS: You mean, fringe benefits? No more such. Only medical, they had. They had a nice hospital, with a stationary doctor always there, with the nurse. And everything, they take care the whole family. No charge to do that thing. So, when anytime, we have little bit pilikia--we cut our hand--we run over there. There's always the doctor helper over there. They'll bandage up and do everything.

MD: How about the name of the camp?

LS: Well, they call 'em New House, and Mill Camp, and every kind. But when I first came--I think I slept in the place called ordinary Mill Camp for about a week. Then, of course, the plantation has given my father one private home, with how many room? One, two, three, four room. Besides the cooking house, so there's no more smoke in the house. Well, nice house. Well ventilated. Of course, no fancy paint, you know. All whitewash. Except the door.

MD: What do you remember about the door?

LS: Doors were dark grey. Only the doors.

MD: Strong doors?

LS: Oh, yeah. Not the regular door like now--this kind of thin door. [LS points to his door.] Was a solid wood door.

MD: Your father being a luna--okay, he's a foreman--was his house better?

LS: No, no, no.

MD: He was no better than the other . . .

LS: All the same. Only, it's a private, individual house.

MD: They were all private, individual houses?

LS: Yeah.

MD: One family, one house. What kind of people lived in that camp where you were? Are there Filipinos?

LS: No, all Japanese. All Japanese. Filipino, all Filipino. Puerto Rican, all Puerto Rican.

MD: But in the same camp?

LS: Different.

MD: It's different camp?

LS: Yeah.

MD: Now, since you are all separated--camp here, camp there--how did you get along with them?

LS: I don't know. They were far distance. You even shoot 'em, and the bullet won't reach. By the mile.

(Laughter)

MD: How about the foods that you ate in Ewa?

LS: Food? Well, you buy your own food. They had the store. They not supplying you food.

MD: Can you tell us what are some of the foods?

LS: Oh, yeah. And I used to like that thing. Rice, just to begin with, eh? You can buy those soy beans, and lima beans, and that dry sweet potato. And then, they had dry daikon. They call it--even right now--marugiri and sengiri. Too bad, your dad's store never sold those things, that's why. That's only novelty store. But ordinary grocery, like Kawahara and all those Japanese wholesalers, they used to send the salesmen [to] all the camps, getting orders. We had one butcher shop. That, Chinese operate the thing. But, even at that, I haven't seen pork, even those days. Maybe where the Filipinos [lived] and other people, they may have had pork, but not around us. Then, of course, we had the tōfu factory, specializing only on tōfu.

Those single-men house were different, you know. One long barracks system for all single men. They would gamble like a devil.

MD: Tell us what you folks do in the school in Ewa?

LS: Well, the same thing. It's still going on the same way.

MD: What do you mean by "the same way?"

LS: Well, in the morning, first of all--like I say, I never liked singing songs, so I never sing songs. And I think they had the Christian hymn. I don't know what the wordings were, but. Then, other kind of songs. They had "America." I remember that. "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty." I learned that.

MD: How about the language of instruction. Is it Japanese . . .

LS: English. English school.

MD: English school? No more Japanese instruction?

LS: Well, that's different. Japanese school is Japanese--operate 'em by themselves.

MD: What forms of recreation you had in Ewa?

LS: Well, they had the younger group get together, play baseball. Baseball was only about the general recreation. And they [immigrants] bring with them judo, and kendō, and everything. They had almost anything. I think, in Hawai'i, those days, was even more prosperous than in Japan. Oh, yeah.

MD: Were you ever involved with this recreation?

LS: Well, only I was a kid, so I never did go. And then, the sumō, of course.

MD: How does the daily life look like in Ewa?

LS: Well, I think it was very good.

MD: Like you kids, what do you folks do?

LS: Well, we just look around there. And those days, no such thing as kids' curfew. (Laughs)

MD: Then, about holidays, again.

LS: In January, and then February. I can tell you, in February, Washington Day [i.e., Washington's Birthday], my father used to give us one dollar. By then, already, I used to have quite a number of friends, and we get in the train. . . . I think was ten cents to Honolulu. Then, of course, kids--regardless of what ticket you have--you can go on the first class or second class. Or, where that conductor's office, on this funny wagon. We used to go over there, talk around with that old man.

Then, of course, when we go to Honolulu. . . . It's a funny thing, you know. Myself and the other kid. He was a Hawaii-born, but he doesn't know any better, and I don't know much, too. But we get in the streetcar; we go to Waikiki. But before we go to Waikiki, we used to go to that old fish market. And what I used to like to buy was that tiny, small sausage. Small sausage. It's about this size [gestures], but I don't know how much it was. I used to buy that. The other friend of mine was a fat guy. He liked roast pork. He roll [LS makes sound like rolling paper]. Then we both carry that, get in the streetcar; we go down Waikiki. We go to the store and buy those black-sugar manjū bread, with soda water. We sit under the shade. Then we go [to the] aquarium, where we used to go see the fish. And we stay loaf around there whole day, come back. That was the very best time.

MD: How often did you do that?

LS: Well, on every holiday. Those days, the Washington Day was well celebrated, but I wonder why, gee, I never felt very much about Fourth of July. Although Fourth of July come, the Japanese get together, themselves. They used to make this fireworks. Those days, they smart. We kids used to make our own. Smaller size, not those huge ones. Theirs is about that big. Ours, we made the small ones. We used to get bamboo, and then they would light the fuse, and shhh-pok! That kind, we used to play ourselves.

Just like when the thing goes up, then when it bursts up there, then you get the umbrella. Sometimes we hang something here. Another firecracker here. And one of them coming in the way, they go bam! Burst again. We used to make all kinds.

MD: So, the holidays were very nice?

LS: Yeah. Daytime and nighttime, well, we didn't care. And then, when we read about the Halloween, I remember one time. Oh, boy, that poor kid. They were so scared, I thought they going make. They get scared because we hung [something] down. We planned--myself and one more kid--Japan[-born] boy, just like me. We were the guys that planned all the nasty kind, see? We climbed on top the tree and put him down, eh? And then, oh. How did we have it lighted? Anyhow, whoa, boy, those crying kids. They saw that; they get scared.

MD: Can you talk about that 1909 strike?

LS: Well, all I remember is, my mother was so brave. She opened the door, she sat right on the threshold. She say, "If anybody is brave enough, step over here, come in. See what happen." Nobody did come up.

MD: Can you tell us about your father's . . .

LS: You see, my father went and negotiate with the plantation about the house. Because everybody moved to Honolulu [during the strike], and there's no facilities. They sleep in the park, and everywhere, under the street awnings. That's what they did. So, my father went and negotiate. And the plantation agreed, with one condition. As soon as the strike is over, go back to work. Okay. But the people said, "No, Sugimoto got bribed from the plantation. That's why he wants to keep everybody in the plantation. So, we going to kill him." They all bring the hoe, and the pick, and everything.

MD: How come your father is a negotiator in the strike?

LS: They elected him.

MD: Who elected him?

LS: Everybody got together and they elected him as a mouthpiece.

MD: Oh, the workers?

LS: Yeah. But when he reported that the plantation agreed to let [the workers] stay in the plantation, with one condition, as soon as the strike is over, we have to go back to work, they didn't like that. They said, "He got the bribe, so now we going to fix him."

MD: What was the cause of the strike, anyway?

LS: More money. They like more pay. That's all. There was nothing. There were no conflicts about the fringe benefits. Because everything was taken care [of]. They had nice hospital. If you get hurt in the home or you get sick out in the field or home, they'll accept you in there as an in-patient. No problem about the health department. Then they have a very good doctor, always there, 24 hours.

MD: So, what was it like in Ewa during the strike?

LS: Well, in the beginning, while they had money, nobody going to feed them free. So, the first thing, I think, the plantation did was to cut off the outside people coming in. So, those salesmen from outside coming in to sell food [were] not allowed.

MD: How long was the strike?

LS: Why, by God, now, I don't know. It lasted for, shee, about. . . . Anyhow, was about three or four months, I think.

MD: After that, you folks had to leave Ewa for Honolulu?

LS: Yeah. Because, you see, you know how he left? Well, maybe, time already had passed, and lot of those people who were looking for him no longer lives, I think. Was a man named Okada [who] used to be a--not exactly a pal--but he was a comrade for that same opinion. He put him [LS's father] inside one icebox. You know, those ice kind box. Nail 'em up. And he pushed that in the car to train station. He wait for the train to come. When train come, he load 'em up, and he rode the horse back. Went a few stations ahead, and put him outside. And then, after that, nobody knew--I didn't know--even my mother didn't know where he was. After, when he came home, he said he was with his cousin, who was working [for] the Dillingham's [as a] yardboy. Nobody could know where.

MD: What were your feelings about life in Ewa, overall, for the people?

LS: Oh, you mean, the adult people? I wouldn't know. But I think they were happy, because there wasn't any commotion or any trouble at all. All they wanted was more pay.

MD: After the strike, was the pay raised?

LS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They got some advance in pay. I don't know how

much.

MD: You don't know how much they got?

LS: No, no. Because soon after--my father--after he came home, I think he was getting \$45 then, at that time, after the strike. But he didn't stay.

MD: You have to leave?

LS: Yeah. He says, "Oh, never mind the plantation life. I'm going to move to Honolulu." And he had those people from where he came from in Japan. Was a good tailor. Got together and went co-partner. And he started a tailor shop, which he, himself, didn't know nothing about making clothes.

MD: Okay, Lloyd, we'll stop from this, now. We'll come back again, and we'll talk about you moving to Honolulu. Okay? It's long already.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 9-2-2-80

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto (LS)

November 3, 1980

Kealahou, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Modesto Daranciang (MD) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MD: This is an interview with Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto. Today is November 3, 1980, and we are at his home at Hale Ho'okipa elderly housing, Kealahou, Kona, Hawaii.

Okay, Mr. Sugimoto, when did you move to Honolulu?

LS: (Pause) I think it's about 1910 or 1911. I'm not sure, now.

MD: Why?

LS: Well, because, you see, on account of the strike, my dad was put in such a position that people in Ewa Plantation looked to him as though an enemy. So, he left there. He moved to Honolulu. But I was left in the plantation for one year or two year, I don't know. Then, I went to Honolulu after. And that was 1908 [when LS first arrived], so maybe 1910. Yeah.

MD: Why not some other place? Why Honolulu?

LS: Well, that's where they were--my folks were there.

MD: So you followed them?

LS: Yeah.

MD: What part of Honolulu?

LS: That street is no longer there, but there was a street called Aala Street. That's between Beretania and King Street, right across from the Oahu Railroad Station. It's a park now. No more street there now.

MD: When you moved to Honolulu, what were your impressions of Honolulu?

LS: Small boy, I didn't have much idea. Only thing, I was near to Aala Park where those unprofessional baseball players used to be whole

day there. I could have become a good player if I kept on. But, I wasn't so--even right now, you know--I'm not so interested about those things.

MD: What was your father's first job in Honolulu?

LS: Well, without knowing a thing about a tailor, a friend of his convinced him to start a tailor shop. So, I guess he financed the place. And he goes out to take orders for the suits, while the other guy stays in there and makes the suit.

MD: Did he hold other jobs aside from the tailor shop?

LS: After a while, his most trusted--the tailor, that is--got all the jobs from the town one, and he keeps the money. So, my poor old man got (laughs) stuck with it. So, the thing got busted, and they promised to pay him. But I don't know whether he got the money paid or not.

MD: Do you have a name for the tailor shop?

LS: No, I don't remember that. He had a name, I know that.

MD: How about the name of the tailor? The one who do the sewing?

LS: A man named by Oda.

MD: Just Oda? And the first name?

LS: Oda. His first name was Ryotaro. You fellas cannot pronounce.

MD: Then, after the tailor job, did your father hold some other jobs?

LS: Yeah. See, he was originally, from Japan, the cabinetmaker. So, he went back to carpentry.

MD: How long did he hold the carpentry job?

LS: Oh, that, I don't know. In the beginning, he was constantly on the job, but towards the last. . . . He started a small business--this peddling business. He bought a horse and a wagon. This, hmm. . . . What do they call those things? Like combs, and ribbons, and those things.

MD: He peddled?

LS: Yeah, small little family things. Then we load it up, and we used to go out in the country. You take, for instance now, vacation time, I used to go around with him [to] Wahiawa. Going from Waipahu, dirt roads. There were no such thing as [asphalt] road. We just crawled through the little--any way that we can. Go up there, sleep in those plantation laborer house--empty house, that is. My

father would stretch out a little tray that he had, right along the veranda. Oh, he used to make good business. Sell men undershirt, and things like that, and this few kind of toys--that most popular toys. Baseball, and those gloves, and things like that.

MD: Is he going from Honolulu to Wahiawa to sell all those stuff?

LS: Yeah, and not only Wahiawa. Then, from there, maybe, we went to Waialua. Same thing. We go to the empty house veranda, stretch out the whole thing. Then, after the store close, we just sleep in that empty house.

MD: You sleep in the night, then go back in the morning?

LS: Well, we carried almost everything. Pots and pans for tea and coffee. He did that for about two years. Then, where did we move to? Oh, we moved to those apartment. And from there, he used to be steady carpenter. But, then, friend of his came around, say, "How say? Do you have any experience in farming?" Which my father never did in his life.

But anyhow, he said, "That's all right. I'll give you a hand."

So, we moved to Moiliili. And we started to raise taro. Taro patch, see? Not only that. This thing was operated by elderly Chinese men. So, you know---no, I don't think you people will ever know those things. Right on Aala Street, early Sunday morning, those Chinese old, elderly people used to line up those koi. And this, Japanese call "funa." Not carp. Looks like. And those catfish. Well, all kinds of those pond, freshwater fish. We used to catch that, and then, over the moist burlap, line them up. We used to sell those. With ducks--those young ducks, three-month [old] duck. We used to make good [money] on the thing. And at one time, of course, we had few pigs. Then, we bought [i.e., started a] transportation business. Driven by horse, not those trucks, like now.

MD: Where was the pond?

LS: Moiliili. The pond no longer there now. That place is all. . . . You know where, before, Moiliili had a baseball field? Not the one on ma uka side, you know, of King Street--the one on ma kai side. Right inside the kiawe bushes. That's where the pond was.

WN: That's where the old [Honolulu] stadium was?

LS: Yeah, yeah. And then, afterward, [there was] some kind of dispute about the lease. My father was forced to buy all the lease. So, we owned, one time, the leasehold of that whole stadium [land]. Not for long. Because when they made that King Street pavement, our portion wasn't quite \$6,000--we have to pay for the pavement of the road, where our leasehold is. Oh, my father get headache about

that thing. So, we sold out the thing.

Then, the taro was making pretty good. That's how I learned something about poi taro. How they make poi. Because if you don't know anything, those buyers will come and put all kind of nonsense on the taro. They try to knock the price down. And the taro, of course, grows by itself.

From day to day, we raise ducks in there. We buy, [for] 25 cents, the one just hatched that morning--incubator hatch. Then we bring them up for three months, and we sell them for 75 cents. But that 75 cents, we could get a good profit of 50 percent any day. Because, why? Only feed them this honohono, chopped up with the middling. We used to go to the slaughterhouse and get those bones, and skins, and those remnants; cook them together with chicken corn. Then, you see how the thing grow very fast. And at the same time, we had those fishes in the pond. Anything that we handle, we make something out of. At the same time, we had--even those days--hey, papaya, not as good price as now, but we used to sell papayas.

MD: How big was the farm?

LS: Farm, itself, was, altogether, two acres, taro patch; and about a acre of the fish pond; and the remnant, about half a acre of dry land where we had our houses, and our stable, and our transportation utensils. But then, when he had a little bit money accumulated, he started to get nostalgic--wanted to go home, visit his birthplace. So, we sold out the whole thing, and he went to Japan. Then, of course, I started to do something else, so I didn't bother.

MD: While your father operated the farm, what did you do to help your father?

LS: Well, most of the time, like I say, he had a transportation business, so he [was usually] out. When I come home from school, I used to take care the farm. Nothing to take care. Because once the [taro] leaves started to get bushy, no grass grows. Just leave it. Only thing you have to watch is the water supply. Don't get 'em too dry, and not to get it overflowed.

The main thing why we have to watch is because we had the fish in the pond. You know those carp--koi. You see, our pond, unlike other persons', we have to raise [carp]. So, we get the eggs in season and get the fish eggs into a big screen made box in the pond. And we used to hatch 'em in there. Feed the dark eggs only. And then, when they about three-eight to half inch, we let the whole thing go in the taro patch.

During the hot sun, somehow, that thing grows. That is, after the taro dug---after the taro is sold and harvest, we wait for the roots to decay. During that time, we put about two inches water [from the] pond in there, and we let those little fishes, about quarter inches,

in there. In less than two months, that grows to about inch to inch and a half. Very quick. By then, all the roots and the grass is rot, ready to plant another batch of the taro, you know, you don't have to do anything. All you do is close the water coming in [from] the pond. Those little fishes, just about inch and a half, they come over there. All jump right into the big pond. You don't have to chase them. That's why, to catch koi, I can go and steal your most important one, without making a noise. I know just how to grab the thing.

MD: Okay, now, you said you helped in the farm when you come home from school. What school did you go at this time?

LS: Royal. That's where all the Japanese kids goes (chuckles) anyhow.

MD: And then, the Royal School, what did you study?

LS: Well, that's in elementary school. Everything. No specific thing.

MD: The instruction, is it English or Japanese?

LS: Oh, Japanese school, I went separate, of course.

MD: So, you went to Royal School, and you also go to Japanese school?

LS: Yeah. But Japanese school, before the time school start, we used to go. Early in the morning.

MD: Early in the morning, you go to Japanese school. Then, during the day, you go to . . .

LS: Royal School. Come home, then work in the taro patch.

MD: How do you get to school? Do you have a ride when you go?

LS: Two and a half cents, one way. City Rapid Transit.

MD: So, from your house, you go to Japanese school, take the rapid transit, come back . . .

LS: Come back time, another two and a half cents. So, we get ten cents a day. Two and a half cents, go; two and a half cents, come back. That's five cents. Other five cents, use two and a half cents, lunch. Gives us two slice of bread--two and a half cents.

MD: How did you feel about going to Japanese school early in the morning, and then go to Royal School a little bit later?

LS: No, I don't feel anything. Just like you go to work in the morning, and come home, pau hana. That's about all. That's why, like I told you last time, being a Japanese, you cannot own land; you can't even do anything [if] you a Japanese alien. That's why, I

never had any interest in going to school. Only thing is to learn the conversation, and whatever the thing. That's about all.

MD: So, you learned English from Royal. Royal Elementary School. Did you enjoy it?

LS: Not so good.

MD: Why?

LS: Because, to start with, I never had an interest in. Because I never had intention that I'm going to live whole life [in Hawaii]. I still had an idea, when I be able to, I going back to Japan. Just like the old folks. Because, even after I grow up, if not for this McClellan law, maybe you won't find me here. Because, Japanese, you [couldn't] own land. You want to go fish, you pay ten dollar, while the kids pay ten cents. "You want to do this? No, you Japanese. No."

MD: Now, was that the reason you quit school?

LS: Well, because that's the end. After eighth grade. Unless you go to high school, there's no more. My father begged me to go. I says, "No, no, no, no. I not going."

MD: Now, what is the Fort Street Hongwanji Japanese School?

LS: They call it a Japanese high school. It's the mission school, in fact.

MD: Did you go to that school?

LS: Yeah, I went. On the high school division--not so-called high school, but chugaku is intermediate, actually. But in Japan, that was the system. And we used, not those books that made in Hawaii, you know. We used all the books that was made in Japan.

MD: What did you learn there? Only Japanese?

LS: Well, everything. Language, the characters, reading, speaking, history.

MD: So, that was nineteen . . .

LS: Yeah, I graduated 1914, I think. Nineteen fourteen or 1916. We were the fourth graduate [class] from the school. First year, second year, third year, fourth. We were the fourth one.

MD: How about going back to your father's transportation express business?

LS: Was good. I still get the license in there. [LS points to drawer.]

MD: What was that? What was that all about?

LS: Transportation.

MD: What kind of a transportation?

LS: Anything. You [customer] would say, "Say, I have a box that I want to send down Kailua."

"Okay." We go down there, get the box, take it down there.

Then, you would say, "Say, we going to move house."

"Okay." We go over there. Transportation.

MD: Do you make good money at it?

LS: Oh, yeah. Especially one case, I remember. We went on Lusitana--no, no. What the street name, I don't know. But from there, we took--one Hawaiian household--all the goods, down to Diamond Head. Right below Diamond Head. They call that Kapahulu section. This guy happened to be working for Honolulu Waterworks. He had plenty [of] those cast-iron pipes--broken kind. After we haul everything, he didn't have enough money to pay us. So, we told 'em, "How's about we trade you [for] all those cast-iron--the junk."

He say, "Oh, okay."

So, I tell you, we made plenty money on the thing. Because it had that big valve. You know what a valve is? This big pipe, where they close the city water--broken kind. And in there, where the water gate touches, is solid brass and bronze. So, we brought it home, bust 'em up, and we sold the cast iron and the bronze separately. Oh, I tell you, I made plenty money on (chuckles) that thing.

And the best one was, he had a broken. . . . You know those big wagon? Wagon had a steel tire--made of wood, but the surrounding was a iron ring around the side. And had the broken kind, you know, to make that round ring. Happened to be, I know a blacksmith had the same model, but his one is broken on one roller. This one the guy has, that one is perfect. So, I took the thing. How much? I tell you, I sold 'em for, I think, about \$60. That was about two times more than the whole expense that we transported the household goods.

MD: How long did you have that business? How many years did you have that business?

LS: That business? Oh, I don't know how long, but it was quite long, I know that.

MD: And you made plenty money from that?

- LS: Oh, yeah. When my father went back to Japan, he didn't mean to stay there, you know. But he [didn't] want to come back, so he wrote to me to sell the farm. And I did. Meanwhile, I used to do the transportation [business] for him. Every penny I make, I used to send to him.
- MD: Did you have truck or anything to transport the goods for other people?
- LS: Yeah.
- MD: What kind of a truck or car?
- LS: Horse-driven wagon.
- MD: You never have a car? Motorized car?
- LS: Those days? There were no such thing as motorized car. Then, another good business was. . . . We see they demolish a house. Then, we go over there. We contract the cleaning of the place. "Say, I'll clean the place for you for so much. No charge, but I going take all the junks away." Those days, that firewood--the old, broken piece of lumber--used to make more money than hauling.
- MD: You sell [to] them. After you moved from Moiliili, you went to Waimanalo. Why did you come to Waimanalo?
- LS: That was during the time that Territory of Hawaii enact a law to abolish foreign-language schools. They use the word "foreign," but their purpose was Japanese-language schools, because they were quite prosperous then. They had big influence among the community, see? So, the Japanese had a litigation between the territory and the Japanese community. So, the language school have to be closed, but, whether it was the end of the litigation or in between, they had the law that you can open the school, provided that the instructor be able to speak English language.
- MD: When was that? Do you know the year?
- LS: No, I do not know. [The law to abolish foreign-language schools was enacted in 1921.] I know I went to Waimanalo 1922, I think, if I remember very correct. Because I went to that Hongwanji language school and graduated from that high school. Emmyo Imamura was the head of Hawaii Honpa Hongwanji. He came to me and said to preserve the life of the Hongwanji. He ordered me to go to Waimanalo to establish that school.
- MD: So, you started the school.
- LS: That's how I happened to go.
- MD: Who sponsored the school? Is that Mr. Imamura or the community?

- LS: Well, the sponsoring is those people, laborers, in Waimanalo.
- MD: Oh, the people in Waimanalo?
- LS: Yeah, they are the one that contributed, and they paid me.
- MD: Where was the school located in Waimanalo?
- LS: Well, if you don't know the geographic condition, it's no use me telling you. It was in between the cane field, anyhow.
- MD: Was it near the camps, where the people lived, or far from the houses?
- LS: Well, it's, say, about a quarter mile away from the camp. Laborers' camp. Close to the English school that they had there.
- MD: What did you teach in the school?
- LS: Read and write.
- MD: Was it taught in English or in Japanese?
- LS: No, must be conduct in. . . . Yeah. But funny, that's where I don't understand. The law [said] that children under third grade--the first, second, third--must be taught in English. That law came after, when I came to Kona [in 1926]. Before that, that law wasn't there. You don't have to teach the children with English at all.
- MD: So from one to three, you teach in English?
- LS: Yeah. That is, after I came to Kona.
- MD: Yeah. Then, four to five, six . . .
- LS: Well, that is altogether in Japanese language.
- MD: Now, from Waimanalo, you moved to Kona.
- LS: Yeah.
- MD: Why did you come to Kona?
- LS: Why? I was appointed. That is, asked by these people to go to Kona. We had the same trouble hiring the language schoolteacher, [since an English speaker was needed].
- MD: Who were the people who asked you?
- LS: The same Hongwanji ministry group. Especially that Reverend or Bishop Imamura, at the time.

MD: Before you came to Kona, what were your feelings about Kona?

LS: Well, that was a long, most romantic story. Because 1919, when we had that Alike [lava] flow [for] about two weeks, right from the top of the mountain down to the sea--1919 flow, you can still see. Shee, how I wanted to see a volcano river of fire. . . . Was no more money. I wasn't brave enough. And this happened to be when Reverend Imamura told me about Kona. Kona is having trouble to hiring a language schoolteacher. The president of the group is my good friend in Honolulu. Adachi. I don't think you know. He used to be the bookkeeper for Captain Cook Coffee Company. Assistant, that is. McKillop used to be the bookkeeper, and Adachi used to be his assistant. And I knew him from Honolulu. So, the curiosity about the volcano. "Shee, when we go to Kona, you can go and see," thinking that the volcano flow [would be] right next to where I was coming, eh? (Laughs) So, I came. But, few years after [arriving in Kona], actually, another flow went right down. And I tell you, I stood right there for whole night, watch how the fire river flows down to the sea. I even went by sampan, too.

MD: Anybody told you about Kona?

LS: No, absolutely nothing. I didn't know. All I know, I had the impression about that 1919 flow. That kind of interest me. When I got in the steamer there--of course, I know no one over here--but I definitely knew somebody from the welcoming group will come and get me at the dock. That much, I knew.

MD: Where was the dock or the wharf?

LS: Oh, at Kailua.

MD: Kailua? Not Napoopoo?

LS: No.

MD: Now, when you came to Kona, where was the school?

LS: We didn't have a school building. So, I used to use the Konawaena grammar grade room.

MD: Oh, you used that, eh? How many students did you have?

LS: Forty-seven.

MD: How many teachers did you have?

LS: Well, when I came, was just myself. In eight different grades, with, like the top grade, had four [students]. And the small ones. . . . Well, you know, only few on each grade, see?

MD: So you were teaching several grade levels?

- LS: Yeah, the whole thing, myself. Shuffle around, see? And plenty room. I keep one row of this grade, one row of this, all mixed.
- MD: Who sponsored the school?
- LS: The community. But the non-litigating community. Because the litigating has another one.
- MD: Where did your students come from?
- LS: Oh, from Kainaliu to Captain Cook.
- MD: Were there other Japanese schools during that time?
- LS: Oh, yeah. It had six or seven of 'em. Only this one, the central Kona was the one that is all the town [area].
- MD: Do you have a name?
- LS: Yeah. Kealakekua Educational Home.
- MD: How much do the students pay to come? Their tuition?
- LS: Tuition? I don't have a definite [figure], though.
- MD: Do they always pay you in money, or they also pay you in kind? Like fruits, foods, and . . .
- LS: Oh, all in money. They gave me a house. I used to live in that house, right there. Right opposite Kamigaki's store has a old--in a hollow--one cottage.
- MD: Who owned that? The school owned that?
- LS: No, no, no, no. School pay the rent for it for me. Well, that's where I was living.
- MD: How about your salary? How much do you make a month?
- LS: Eighty dollars.
- MD: Eighty dollars. Just eighty dollars?
- LS: Yeah.
- MD: Free house?
- LS: Yeah. Well, of course, I have to buy the kaukau myself, but they gave me all the utensils, and the house, and everything.
- MD: Did you do your own cooking and household . . .

LS: In the beginning, I used to do, but [later] I used to go to eat at. . . . That restaurant no longer here, so you won't know. It's right in front. You know where Morita Garage? It's not garage anymore, but little more beyond there had a restaurant, run by a family name by Murayama.

MD: What was your method of instruction in your school?

LS: Instruction? Well, we had a textbook to teach them how to read and conversational. Even in those days, already, they were emphasizing more on conversational, not the characters and words.

MD: What did you teach in school?

LS: Well, from the textbook, we teach them how to read Japanese words. And, of course, the conversation. And then, how to write. You know, the Japanese characters, if you don't know the order of those lines [strokes], you can't get it correct, see?

MD: You said, at the beginning, that you were teaching several grades, yeah?

LS: Eight grades, altogether.

MD: How long was that that you were teaching alone?

LS: Well, in a short while, I had another high school student that was very good on Japanese. So, the school hired one girl. No, first, we hired Christian. . . .

MD: Missionaries?

LS: Yeah, missionary's wife, to start with. Then, it wasn't enough because the students were increasing constantly. So, we can't take too many, so we have to hire. Then, toward the last, I have seven, with myself.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MD: . . . time when you had the Japanese school, what was the Japanese community like at that time?

LS: Well, I would say, all coffee planters. Almost 99 percent were coffee planters, see, coffee farmers. So, they were quite harmonious, and things used to go very good, I would think. I used to call on the parents, quite often, to different places, constantly, almost every night.

MD: Was the Japanese school well accepted?

LS: Oh, yeah. Because while I was conducting the school, they already were talking about building the Japanese own school. But after I quit and went to another person's, then they really built a school of their own. Right back of that Konawaena School.

MD: So, you did quit after that? Before they built the big school, you quit?

LS: Why I quit? Those parents got the idea, "We are paying you salary." They kinda thumb down on everything. Can't even express your proper opinions. And, like I told you, when I was a little, young kid, I used to get seven dollars a day, so I never care to work for the school. I always had an idea, looking for the little better pay, see? Meanwhile, this Wing Hing from Honolulu came one time, and we had a chance to talk acquaintantly. Then, he even offered me a job.

MD: What kind of a job?

LS: Oh, that, I wouldn't know. But he said, "You come. You can go out work in the office or you can go out sell coffee." Wing Hing. That's the financier from Hawaii Coffee Mill.

MD: How come you did not take the job?

LS: Well, I didn't care to go, because he offered me--I was getting \$80, only--and he told me he going to give me \$125. But that is in Honolulu, you know. I didn't care for [\$125] in Honolulu.

MD: What is the reason why?

LS: Because I never had interest in Honolulu at that time. Because like I always say, being a Japanese, no place for me to stay in Hawaii. So, as soon as I had a chance, I going back to Japan.

MD: You [just] like all us Filipinos, eh? Three year 'nough. Anything you remember about Wing Hing and his business?

(Laughter)

LS: Yeah. You see, there was a man named by Otsu. He used to work for Hawaii Coffee Mill. It was during the weekend or the vacation, I met 'em on the road, and he told me, "Say, Mr. Sugimoto, you want to go to Hilo?"

Well, I don't know much about Hilo those days, eh? So I say, "Say, that's a good chance. Okay, let's go."

Okay, you see? And he told me, "Our boss, Mr. Wing Hing, is coming to audit, or whatever it is, to Hawaii Coffee Mill. So I'm on my

way to Hilo to pick him up."

That's how I happened to go. So, naturally, when we went to Hilo, we went--where did we pick him up? I don't know. Then, that's how I happened to get acquainted.

MD: Where was the coffee mill located that Mr. Wing Hing going to audit?

LS: The mill is no longer there, but the place is right there. As you go across, you know where in Japanese, it says, "Odai-san" over there? As you go up the road, there's a small, old cottage there. That used to be Ho Wai Kong. He's a Chinese man that Wing Hing Company [hired] to watch the Hawaii Coffee Mill operation. And Hawaii Coffee Mill, at that time, was managed by a man named by Mr. Morita. See? And they had the mill right there. I think, maybe, the building is still there. Right below the road there.

MD: So, that's how you come into contact with Mr. Wing, eh?

LS: Yeah. That's how. I went with Otsu to pick him up in Hilo for him to come to Kona.

MD: How come he offered you job in Honolulu and not in Kona?

LS: That, I don't know. Then, long after, I used to go to Honolulu, and I used to call on that Wing Coffee [Company]. I used to go and call on him all the time. But that time, already, I never care for the job.

MD: What year was that, you think?

LS: Around 1924, I think. I'm not so sure now. Because I started to work for [American] Factors [in] 1926. See? Some few years before that.

MD: Okay, pau today.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 9-3-3-80

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto (LS)

November 4, 1980

Kealahou, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Modesto Daranciang (MD) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MD: This is an interview with Lloyd Kenzo Sugimoto. Today is November 4, 1980, and we are at his home at Hale Ho'okipa elderly housing, Kealahou, Kona, Hawaii.

Okay, Lloyd, how did you get started with this coffee buying business?

LS: Well, that was because Mr. [Takumi] Kudo that owns that coffee mill over there is a good friend of mine. He does not finance the farmer all the time, so he cannot buy, ordinarily, unless the coffee planter [farmer] is an independent one that is not in connection with any other store. So, only way to buy coffee is to go around, [buy] from the individuals who are not direct contact with those credit system with the store. But then, that won't give him enough coffee, so once in a while, we go out; we buy from those people who are bound with some stores.

MD: Mr. Kudo approached you?

LS: Yeah. But that is the old man Kudo, not the young fellow.

MD: How did you know Mr. Kudo?

LS: Well, we used to go to school in Honolulu.

MD: When you do this coffee buying business, how do you know which farmer to approach who's going to give you coffee?

LS: Anyplace. We go to the one that is most broke--the one that owes most money. He know he couldn't get any money if he take the coffee to the creditor [i.e., store], so that's the kind of place we go to.

MD: Does someone also approach you to make a deal like that? Or you folks do the approaching?

LS: Yeah. We just go over there. "Say, you have lots of coffee. How's

about we buying some coffee?" See? They know that their coffee supposed to go to their creditor, but we are trying to buy them on the sly.

MD: If you approach these coffee farmers, what did you tell them? What kind of deal?

LS: Well, just buy it [for] so much, at the market price. Or maybe, little better than the market [price]. But we don't buy them during the broad day; we buy them midnight. That's what they call the "midnight coffee."

MD: How come midnight?

LS: If the creditor catch him selling to elsewhere, he be in trouble. He can't do that.

MD: But how did you keep these farmers from being caught by the storekeepers?

LS: Well, because we supply them with a brand new [coffee] bag. No more brand [name], no more stencil on the bag. And then, early evening, I guess, they'll put their coffee right inside of the stone wall on their property. And when midnight comes, our truck moves very slowly, throw them on top. Only one side [of the truck]. So, when he get full on this side, he goes the other side. Turn the truck, go on the other side, come back again this way. Just throw on.

MD: How much did you offer them in price?

LS: Well, as I say, most likely, on the market price.

MD: No more, no less?

LS: Well, sometimes, we pay them little more because we are desperate of need of raw material.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MD: What is the relationship between the storekeeper and the coffee farmer? Why they have to give all the coffee to the storekeeper?

LS: Because from January 1st to December 31st of each year, the farmers are being financed [by the stores] in cash and merchandise--their food, everything. So, it's the farmer's obligation that he have to take it to over there. That's in payment of those goods that he already bought in advance.

MD: What happens if this farmer is caught by the storekeeper selling his . . .

LS: Well, I wouldn't know. I presume that the storekeeper will probably

sue the farmer. That's about all they can do. And cut off the credit, of course.

MD: How about you folks, if these guys caught you, too, buying from them?

LS: Well, if the police should come around, I guess we'll have to return the coffee to the farmer. That's the best we can do. We didn't steal it.

MD: How much money did you make from doing this business?

LS: For myself? Well, I used to get half of one cent on a pound.

MD: That will make up to how much every month?

LS: All depend how much I buy.

MD: Can you say a normal month, a usual month, how many bags do you deal?

LS: Well, it's not a month. It's a matter of how many bags or how many pound I buy from them.

MD: Can you tell us approximately how much money you make one month?

LS: Well, I used to make about \$200.

MD: Profit?

LS: No, my commission. Half of one cent per pound.

MD: You folks only dealt with cherry [coffee] or you also dealt with parchment [coffee]?

LS: Oh, parchment, parchment.

MD: Parchment? You never dealt with cherry?

LS: No. See, each bag contains about 75 to 80 pounds.

MD: Parchment?

LS: Yeah.

MD: You never bought cherry?

LS: No, we don't buy cherry coffee. Because, those days, all the farmers used to have their own processing mill from cherry to parchment.

MD: You told us that all the coffee that you folks buy had to go to Mr.

Kudo?

LS: Not "have to"--he's the one that buying it.

MD: Oh, you only . . .

LS: I'm only an agent.

MD: You're only an agent. So, it's understood that all the coffee goes to him?

LS: Yeah, whatever he buys goes to him. And he still has the mill over there.

MD: Mr. Kudo pays cash?

LS: Oh, yeah.

MD: Do you know where he has all this money to buy the coffee?

LS: No worry. The bank. We get the thing; we go to the bank. "So many bags, here's the order from coffee dealers in Mainland. So, I intend to buy so much." The bank advance the money to Kudo.

MD: Do you think Mr. Kudo made much money from this deal?

LS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That's how [Yoshio] Noguchi start his one, too.

MD: Do you know of other people, aside from Mr. Kudo, doing the same thing?

LS: Oh, all those independent mills. You see plenty of them along the road. Every one of them doing it. Only those that don't do-- American Factors, Hawaii Coffee Mill, Captain Cook Coffee Company. Others always stealing coffee. Because there weren't much independent farmers, those days.

MD: So, it was a widespread operation?

LS: It is widespread.

MD: How does American Factors get its coffee?

LS: Well, you see, American Factors finance all those stores along the road. See? Factors finance the merchandise, and the cash, and everything what they need.

MD: So, all the coffee that the storekeepers can collect from the farmers, they are obligated . . .

LS: Obligated to American Factors. And, of course, Captain Cook had their own land over there, all around, the so-called Captain Cook

district today. And Hawaii Coffee Mill, smaller portion, here and there. That Hawaii Coffee Mill belongs to Wing Hing--Wing Coffee Company.

MD: How many years do you think you were involved in this?

LS: For about two years.

MD: Did you stop after two years?

LS: Then, after I went to work for [American] Factors, I no longer did it.

MD: So, you went to American Factors. Can you tell us how you got the job, American Factors?

LS: I had a friend. Afterwards Mr. [L.C.] Child [American Factors' manager] asked the friend of mine if I wanted to work for [American] Factors.

MD: How much did he tell you about American Factors before you accepted the job?

LS: Well, he only came up and told me. You see, I used to be a single guy. At the same time, I used to buy coffee, but I used to go around selling insurance. Maybe two, three weeks, I selling here; then I used to go to Kohala; then I used to go to Ka'u and stay two, three weeks, either side.

So, he come to me, "Say, you know, a rolling stone will never have any moss. Maybe you making good, but nobody knows who you are. Because Kohala people say, 'Oh, he's from Kona.' Kona people want to look around for you, you never here. And when you go to Ka'u, the same thing. So, you better steady on one place. To do that, you have a offer here from American Factors to work for them. I think you better accept it."

I say, "Okay." Doesn't make any difference to me.

MD: How much money did they offer you to take the job?

LS: Eighty-five dollars.

MD: Eighty-five dollars is how much you received? Are there no fringe benefits?

LS: Well, whatever they---the wages. He said, "We'll pay you \$85 to start."

MD: No free housing?

LS: Well, I have free house.

MD: Any other benefits, aside from housing?

LS: What do you mean? They had the medical and everything. American Factors always had. That is, a small premium that they used to deduct half of the premium.

MD: For pension?

LS: Yeah, for everything. Whatever, I think. We used to carry John Hancock Insurance Company. That's why my pension still comes from John Hancock.

MD: Remember, previously, you were making \$200 buying coffee for Mr. Kudo. You were making \$200. How come . . .

LS: I used to make \$200. He never gave me. I made that. I worked that out.

MD: That's your commission.

LS: Yeah.

MD: How come you accepted American Factors? It's only [\$85] a month?

LS: That wage is salary. Kudo one, if I don't buy [coffee], I get nothing. And that is only during the most prime season of the coffee. Other than coffee season, you get nothing.

MD: What was your job at American Factors?

LS: Well, a store clerk, bill clerk, salesman, everything.

MD: What do you sell?

LS: Merchandise. Kaukau, dry goods, drugs, and everything, we used to carry.

MD: General store?

LS: Yeah, general [wholesale] store.

MD: Where was your office?

LS: Napoopoo. Right there by the wharf. Only cement, they have left, now.

MD: What were your working hours?

LS: Working hours? Well, I think it was from 8 [a.m.] to 4 [p.m.]. But, during the day, sometimes, busy. Well, I never had any time. I used to work until I get through with the job. And when I had not much job, I used to go fishing during working hours.

- MD: While you working for American Factors, you were a general salesman, as you said. Do you deal with coffee at the same time?
- LS: No, I don't do outside work. Only the office work, that's all. And, of course, we had the post office together there. The postmaster is that manager [L.C. Child]. Of course, he lives little far beyond, so we used to take care the incoming and outgoing mail. You see, fourth-class post office, you get 145 percent of the cancellations. See? So, every three months, he figure out. He used to give us all our share. He used to take one-third, and he take one-third, and I got one-third of the salary that the United States government pay the postmaster.
- MD: Aside from your [\$85] from American Factors?
- LS: Yeah.
- MD: Do you work five days a week or more than that?
- LS: Those days are six days. Work Saturday, too. Not like now.
- MD: And if you work seven days, do you make more money than working five days?
- LS: I don't think so. Well, monthly salary, so much, that's all.
- MD: When you were a store clerk, the coffee farmers bring coffee also?
- LS: No. You see, we had a mill over there--little further up, the [drying] platform is there. Coffee, we had a man there taking care only the coffee.
- MD: Yours is strictly . . .
- LS: In the office. Only office work. Of course, even the coffee, only thing I used to do is figure their pay. We used to hire lots of those local women there to hand-pick [sort] coffee.
- MD: Do you handle the credit also, that the farmers owe American Factors?
- LS: No. In fact, the whole American Factors has nothing to do [with it], except only the store. We finance to the stores; the stores finance the farmers.
- MD: The American Factors' store?
- LS: No, [the] individual [stores] only. [LS worked in the wholesale section of American Factors, which supplied many of the retail stores in Kona with merchandise in exchange for cash and coffee.]
- MD: How many percent of the stores in Kona was financed by American Factors?

LS: Well, I don't know how many. But we start from Kealia, used to be a store named Fujiwara Store. Then, we come this side, we had Morihara. Then, in Honaunau, we had Eto. Then, we had Masuhara in Ke'ei. Then we come to the ma uka road. We had Ege; we had Fujino. Then, we had Marumoto. And Kishi. And Shikada. Those were the [AmFac] Napoopoo branch jurisdiction.

MD: How about Kailua?

LS: Well, Kailua had their own. See, Napoopoo branch was branch of Kailua. You see? Kailua is direct branch of Honolulu American Factors, and Napoopoo was a branch store of Kailua.

MD: How about the mills?

LS: Mills? Yeah, there was a mill in Kailua and there's a mill down in Napoopoo. That's American Factors' mills. They take care all the coffee that comes to American Factors.

MD: To make it clear now, the parchment comes from the storekeepers?

LS: Yeah. And so does the cherry used to come, too.

MD: And then, American Factors do the milling?

LS: Yeah. Not milling for them [stores]. Those coffees are delivered to American Factors as a payment of. . . . So those cherry and parchment doesn't come on farmer's name at all. They came under the store name.

MD: So, it's a process. The coffee farmer gave his coffee to the storekeeper, and storekeeper gave the coffee to American Factors.

LS: Although, you see, in order to check the payment from the farmers, they used to have separate bags and everything.

MD: Was the relationship between the farmers, the storekeepers . . .

LS: Well, there's no such thing. We don't know to whom the store is going to sell or advance that rice, or shōyu, whatever it is. All we know is we are financing the store. From there, whatever the storekeeper does is up to him. We know which ones because he always bring the list of the farmers that he is financing this stuff. But it's up to the storekeeper to take care of their account. We are only interested in the account between the storekeeper and AmFac.

But, I tell you, when the farmers have bad luck and not enough crop, they come to the store. Then they say, "Well, this year the blight comes around and I don't have"--and naturally, the store will bring that to the American Factors, too. So, if the store ever experience loss from a particular farmer, well, the original

financier--the AmFac--is always the one that carries the burden. The AmFac. Just about the time when the Napoopoo branch was to be closed, we were sent out to check the store books, too. Many times, we went.

MD: You never heard about troubles between the stores and the American Factors?

LS: Oh, they had. They had. They had, oh, yeah.

MD: What kind troubles?

LS: No pay. No more money. No more crop.

MD: The storekeepers don't give enough coffee to the American Factors?

LS: Yeah, they'll [storekeepers] come and say, "Say, my account, so-and-so, so-and-so, there's trouble and he can't pay me. So, I, naturally, cannot pay you." Those are the ones that--not me--somebody else bought 'em nighttime. We can presume that. But we didn't catch anybody. You see? Napoopoo branch, I worked in the store, full time, as a billing clerk, and selling, and doing this and that. But we had another man. He's very much expert on Kona land. He used to go out from farmer, check. He used to know, each farmer, this five acres is supposed to yield so many pounds. He used to be good at it. Very good. He no longer living now. He died in Kona. The son is over here.

And we have the man in [charge of] the coffee. Sometimes, they don't mean to, but sometimes they send wet coffee. We call it "wet coffee." Not fully dried, and so that they get more weight. The heavier it is, the more the payment. But we had a man working in our mill over there. The truck brings the coffee; he carries them himself. Then, he let the boys unload the truck. He watch from the side. "Ey! Wait. This side." He says he watch those boys carrying the--supposed to be about 75 pounds. He said, just the way how the boys lift, he can tell that coffee is not dry. Oh, he used to be good at it. Tell the boy, "Ey! This side."

MD: Separate, eh?

LS: Yeah. Then, he put 'em on a scale. Sure enough. Then he gets those long stickers in there, draw the grains out from the middle of the bag, eh? And zzzut! All fill up. "You call this dry? It's not dry." He used to be very good.

MD: What happens if there is a problem between the storekeepers and the farmers?

LS: What can we do? You cannot squeeze the blood out of a stone, you know. We hold them. That's why, we carried them year after year, year after year. So, it looks that American Factors actually made

money, but on reality, I don't think the Factors was made any richer than anybody else. There were two accountants. I know. Personally, we went to check the books. But how they do, you cannot even trust anyone. First, we wen check, that time, everything seems to be in order. And finally, he brought the book. He say, "I can't do no more. I'm going to bankrupt. Here's my property." Plenty things were missing. They were not honest enough. In spite of all the honest accounts that the American Factors carried, they didn't repay us with that same gratitude.

MD: How long did you work for American Factors in Kona?

LS: In Kona? From 1926 to 1936. So, ten years. Over here, at Napoopoo.

MD: Did American Factors close any store for not paying their obligation to American Factors?

LS: You mean, they foreclose?

MD: Yeah, foreclose.

LS: Not that I remember, in South Kona. [If] you do, you go into all the trouble. What's the use? All there is, is there. You going into more trouble, that's all. We try to nurse them around. Try to get as much payment as possible. But there were two of them that really--how people can be that dishonest, I don't know.

MD: You have anything more to add from what you told us about your work, about what you did in American Factors, and all the other things that you think about Kona?

LS: Well, when I first came and worked for Napoopoo--to start with now--we had the hardware department; we had the lumber; we had the grocery; and the chemical; and everything.

When I came to work for Napoopoo, I went to the lumberyard. We were selling the lumber at certain price. Then, I saw that we could get lot more money than what we used to sell. So, I established what they call the grading of the lumber down there. You know, in even those Northwest mills in West Coast, there. They were so much abundant of lumber or logs, so they didn't care as much as they do now. So, they send us the whole shipload. We used to dump the whole ship[load] in the sea, over there--Kealakekua Bay. Then, we used to hire all those people around there to put them up on the sand beach. And we had a big lumberyard over there--Napoopoo.

You see, those houses--these farmers' houses--they had the ceiling. Ceiling was their [coffee] drying platform. You see lot of them still that way, yet. Now, drying, they rake the whole floor whole day. Eventually, the lumber, after wear and tear of the rakes and everything, used to splinter. There are one grade of lumber that we call "H grain." The one that has the straight line. Always

being a better grade, and they charge more. What they call, another name, some people call them "boat lumber." So, when I came to Napoopoo, selling those T-and-Gs [tongue-and-grooves], I used to grade them. Then for platform, I used to tell the manager to add ten dollars to a thousand board fit. Used to get little better price.

MD: So, you did a lot for American Factors, then. Help them out in their business.

LS: Yeah, well, before that, during my Japanese-language schoolteacher period, my friends--farmers--wanted to build a platform. I used to import from Honolulu for them. By importing direct from Honolulu, the farmer used to get cheaper than what they can get from local stores. And better grade.

MD: So, American Factors would be the place, at that time, where you get this lumber with the cheapest money?

LS: Well, what do you mean "cheapest money"? We used to sell 'em at the. . . . The American Factors, Honolulu, didn't carry any lumber. Hilo was carrying the lumber, only. So, we used to have the price list from Hilo, and we used to sell 'em practically the same, I think. We used to use that Hilo price list.

MD: Anything more you like to add here?

LS: No, there's nothing.

END OF INTERVIEW

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF KONA

Volume I

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